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SOCIAL CONTROL. III.

BELIEF.

THE working of the legal and social sanctions described in the last paper is not without grave shortcomings.

1. They do not control that which is done in secret. The law, with all its argus-eyed sleuths, and the press, with all its ferreting reporters, cannot destroy the opportunities of men surreptitiously to get on at the expense of their fellows. Everybody cannot be watched all the time. As the institutions of family and property are always exposed to the secret assaults of trespassers, the need is felt for something that will intimidate a man when he is alone.

2. Law and public opinion are frequently paralyzed by the power of the man they seek to restrain. The current saying, "There is one law for the rich and another for the poor," witnesses that even now the courts do not dispense unvarying justice. The success with which bold or influential men can browbeat their accusers, hoodwink the public, and pluck profit from open offense is proverbial. In view of the failures^{*} of the regular restraining organs, men long for a higher tribunal, where wrongs may be righted and the transgressor get his dues.

3. Human sanctions reach only the outward deed. But it is idle to repress actions when the evil disposition is untouched. Sooner or later opportunity comes and the evil will flashes into

^{*} The weakness of the English common law courts in restraining the powerful led to petitions to the Chancellor, the keeper of the King's conscience. Thus originated the Court of Chancery. "Most of these ancient petitions appear to have been presented in consequence of assaults and trespasses . . . for which the party complaining was unable to obtain redress, in consequence of the maintenance or protection afforded to his adversary by some powerful baron, or by the sheriff or other officer of the county in which they occurred." Preface to calendars of the Proceedings in Chancery, 1827. The petitioner usually beseeches the Chancellor to interfere "for luff of God and in way of charitee."

deed. If pressure could be applied, not to conduct but to the very intents and desires of the heart, something might be done toward reforming character. While moral character is not best built up by fear of the consequences of yielding to certain moods, and hope of reward for cultivating an opposite disposition, pressure of this kind is not without efficacy. In any case, when men reach the reflective stage, treatment according to desert wins much heartier approval than treatment according to deed.

4. The operation both of law and of public opinion is expensive. Moreover, as punishment both legal and social is cheaper than reward, they rely over-much on fear and fail to get the best service out of a man. They hold ground already won, but offer little stimulus to new and signal achievement on behalf of society. Even hope of fame will hardly inspire one to become a hero, martyr, or saint.

The recognition of these facts leads men to desire that defective human control be supplemented by the awards of a judge, who, by his omnipresence, his omnipotence, his omniscience and his infinite resources, might cure these deficiencies. Such a longing can be met only through belief in the supernatural.

If any one is to be influenced in his actions by the recompense attached, he must of course *believe* that the promised requital will come without fail. But this assurance, based on testimony, observation, or former experience, may properly be distinguished from a conviction grounded on inference, tradition, or authority. These unverifiable convictions regarding what is beyond the field of human experience we shall call *belief*, and the control of conduct by means of these convictions we shall term *control by belief*.

The first group of supernatural sanctions rest on the belief that there is a supernatural being who is interested in and follows the doings of men, and that he intervenes in this life to punish the bad and to reward the good. A perfect illustration of this type is yielded by the blessings and curses of the Mosaic law.

"If thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe and do all his commandments . . . all these blessings shall come on thee and overtake thee. . . . Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store . . . and the Lord shall make thee plenteous in goods, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy ground . . . But . . . if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes . . . cursed shall be thy basket and thy store. Cursed shall be the fruit of thy body . . . The Lord shall smite thee with a consumption, and with a fever, and with an inflammation, and with an extreme burning, and with a sword, and with blasting, and with mildew; and they shall pursue thee till thou perish."¹

That a belief that sees in every event of life some immixture of the gods, and interprets every stroke of good or ill fortune in reference to past behavior, gives a tremendous leverage in the control of men, the history of priestcraft shows beyond a doubt. But such an interpretation of life can hardly last among the masses without the plausible explanations of quick-witted priests. A little reflection on life shows an apportionment of good and evil that can be reconciled with no conceivable standards of moral deserts. David sees the "prosperity of the wicked" and confesses that "their eyes stand out with fatness; they have more than heart could wish."² Says Professor Huxley: "If there is a generalization from the facts of human life which has the assent of thoughtful men in every age and country, it is that the violator of ethical rules constantly escapes the punishment

¹ Deuteronomy, chap. 28 :

" . . . Everie countrey chalengeth a severall saint for their patrone, assignning further to each saint a peculiar cure and office, with also sundry ways of worshiping : as this saint helpeth for the toothache, that socoureth in childbyrth; she restoreth stolene goods; another aydeth shipmen in tempests; another taketh charge of husbandmen's hoggs; and so of the rest; far long were it to rehearse all." Erasmus, quoted by Adams in *Law of Civilization and Decay*, p. 156.

² Psalm 73.

which he deserves; that the wicked flourish like a green bay tree, while the righteous begs his bread.”¹

Besides the empirical test the theory that makes human life the sport of the gods succumbs to the victorious demonstration of law in natural events and human affairs. As group after group of happenings are seen to lie in the mesh of law and not in the palm of caprice, the expectation of recompense in this life fades before a growing skepticism. An orderly universe, with an occasional special providence, takes the place of a world riddled with the supernatural.

Thus fades the belief that men's acts dog their earthly footsteps till little is left but the vague feeling that somehow the course of things is against him who spurns the social interdict, or for private ends transgresses the tradition of the community. A dimly seen retributive tendency in life seems to betoken a mysterious moral drift deep in the heart of the universe. Law reigns, but to natural laws is paramount a moral law. This precious reflection that sometimes gives pause to men is carefully fostered by popular novels and dramas that depict the triumph of a justice that, because it occurs only in fiction, is called “poetic.” A realistic treatment of life would shock the popular conviction that all things work together for him who obeys time-honored precepts. The worker for the common welfare, on the other hand, is shown as, in a way, coöperating with the Universe, as backed by invincible forces, and sure to triumph in the long run.

A variant of this type of sanction is the gift of supernatural powers in this life. “The mediæval saint was a powerful necromancer. He healed the sick, cast out devils, raised the dead, foretold the future, put out fires, found stolen property, brought rain, saved from shipwreck routed the enemy, cured headache, was sovereign in childbirth, and, indeed, could do almost anything that was asked of him, whether he were alive or dead.”²

¹ *Evolution and Ethics*, p. 58.

² *Adams*, p. 41.

Another variant may be recognized in the penance. Here the punishment is experienced in this world and inflicted by man. But it is often only belief that makes it poignant. On this kind of sanction rested much of the moral discipline of the church. Nothing but belief could make temporary banishment from the communion table or excommunication an effective penalty. In other cases where the penance consists in abstinence, humiliation, mortification of the flesh, religious exercises, etc., it presents itself as an alternative to a directly supernatural punishment. "Every system of law," says Lecky, "is a system of education, for it fixes in the minds of men certain conceptions of right and wrong, and of the proportionate enormity of different crimes; and no legislation was enforced with more solemnity, or appealed more directly to the religious feelings, than the penitential discipline of the church."¹

A second type of supernatural sanction is presented by the Hindu doctrine of transmigration. Here we are taught that deeds draw after them their appropriate consequences in this world but not in this life. The souls of bad men suffer by being reborn in men of low caste or in animals, while those who are pure, are born again as kings or Brahmins or Devas. The allotment of good and ill to the soul in its wanderings does not proceed from an arbitrary deity nor yet from a just judge, but depends on the law of Karma. Karma is the moral kernel which alone survives death and continues in migration. The law of Karma is simply a doctrine of cause and effect applied to character. "There is no escape, according to this theory, from the result of any act; though it is only the consequences of its own acts that each soul has to endure. The force has been set in motion by itself and can never stop; and its effect can never be foretold."² This Hindu doctrine makes the minimum demand upon the supernatural. Its economy of belief stamps it as a device far superior to the ecclesiastical doctrine of the future states.

¹ *History of European Morals*, Vol. II, p. 8.

² RHYS DAVIDS, *Hibbert Lectures*, p. 85.

A third species of sanction appears with belief in a supernatural life. In two vast unseen worlds, Heaven and Hell, is led an unending life, and the lot of each man through this infinite existence is determined by his doings in this brief earthly span of life. Though the connection of the two lives is close, it is not necessity but the will of a judge that binds them together. Hence the idea of a judgment day when the soul appears before the judge, its record is read, its deeds and thoughts are weighed and its doom is spoken. This analogue to law procedure is found in the religion of Egypt, of Greece, in Calvinism and in Islam. Of the possibilities of such a belief, Lecky writes: "The doctrine of a future life was far too vague among the Pagans to exercise any powerful general influence and among the philosophers who clung to it most ardently, it was regarded solely in the light of a consolation. Christianity made it a deterrent influence of the strongest kind. In addition to the doctrines of eternal suffering, and the lost condition of the human race, the notion of a minute personal retribution must be regarded as profoundly original."¹ "Experience has abundantly shown that men who are wholly insensible to the beauty and dignity of virtue, can be convulsed by the fear of judgment, can be even awakened to such a genuine remorse for sin as to reverse the current of their dispositions, detach them from their most inveterate habits and renew the whole tenor of their lives."²

When there are bonds of love binding the living to the dead, the doctrine of another world yields yet another stimulus. When loved ones dead are thought of as looking back upon this life with their former interest and concern, a powerful motive is given to do only that which will please them. The efficacy of this belief in fostering family piety and strengthening family bonds can hardly be overestimated. It is the ally of society, however, only in one great instance. For hundreds of thousands of young Americans the chief stimulus to self-denial comes not from hope of heavenly reward, but from the convic-

¹ *History of European Morals*, Vol. II, p. 3.

² *Ibid.*, p. 4.

tion that their beloved Master is at this moment living and that he watches their efforts, grieving when they stumble, rejoicing when they stand. This is the most sublimated form of control by belief.

Of the four types of supernatural sanction we have examined, the third is the most characteristic, as it implies the greatest subordination of belief to a scheme of rewards and punishments. Taking it as representatives let us note its excellences and defects.

In the first place its rewards and punishments are cheap and can be amplified to any degree. In the second place, as from the all-seeing eyes of a god there can be no concealment, these sanctions admirably supplement law.¹ Thirdly the blending of belief with law increases the prestige of the latter and provides restraint in cases where the machinery of justice fails to operate. The last judgment is simply an earthly judicial inquest freed from its limitations and exalted to the highest conceivable perfection. The idea of a divine tribunal excludes all brow-beating or cajoling, all conflict of testimony, all partiality, all overlooking of desert by too close attention to outward deed. The divine awards conform to an ideal justice which human awards aspire to but never quite reach.

On the other hand, the drawbacks to this form of control are many. First, the Unseen practically becomes a mere appendix to the Seen. All man's speculation regarding the Invisible is unduly subordinated to the task of regulating people in their social life. Such a shackling of the noble speculative impulse checks the development of human personality, which is, after all, the end for which social life exists. Secondly, this kind of control gets in the way of new and higher forms of control. The guidance of men by ideals, enforced by honor and self-respect, which has become so general since the Reformation,

¹ "The notion of employing curses in defense of property is very ancient." "It was mostly applied to objects that were peculiarly exposed to depredation, such as graves, books, deeds." EARLE, *Land Charters and Saxon Documents*, p. 25.

requires that men rest under the illusion that their thinking is entirely free. The necessary disintegration of belief and rejection of authority which paves the way to this higher species of control has been bitterly opposed at every step by the earthly dispensers of supernatural rewards and punishments. Thirdly, as the whole system rests on belief, this must be hedged with the greatest sanctions. More than any social transgression must the gods hate and punish doubt, unbelief, disregard of the divine will, defiance of the priesthood, or neglect of ecclesiastical requirements. Not only does unbelief become the capital sin and belief the cardinal virtue, but even thumbscrew and stake, ban and outlawry will be used to crush out heresy.¹ Such a perversion of ethical values shocks the refined moral judgment and often drives the best men of a society into revolt.

Fourthly, the unconcern of people for distant consequences of present actions weakens the efficacy of rewards and punishments deferred to the close of this life. To overcome this handicap the horrors of hell and the raptures of heaven are exaggerated to the limits of the imaginable. Priests and seers vie with one another in a vividness of imagery and profusion of metaphor that shall make the future state seem as real as the present. The terror resulting is most fatal to the growth of that human sympathy which makes social control unnecessary. Fifthly, the theory of things with which the supernatural associates itself proves a stumbling-block to the progress of science and the consequent amelioration of human life. The waste of lives by the retardation of medicine and hygiene owing to the resistance of the church was a round price to pay for the discipline afforded by belief in heaven and hell. Sixthly, more perhaps than any other kind of control is belief liable to degenerate into an engine of personal and class oppression. Rarely is it found working obedient to the social interest. Certain cor-

¹ "Multitudinous anomalies occur, however — anomalies which seem unaccountable till we recognize the truth that in all cases the thing which precedes in importance, the special injunctions of a cult, is the preservation of the cult itself and the institutions embodying it." SPENCER, *Principles of Sociology*, Vol. II, p. 815.

rective forces that guard from abuse the other agencies of control seem to be wanting here. History testifies that belief implies a very dangerous sacerdotal ascendancy that has perhaps been as often used against the common interest as for it.

For these reasons the system of supernatural sanctions, however serviceable it may have been during the early stages of social evolution, when laws were feeble, men fierce, and the finer instruments of discipline almost unknown, is today a decadent form of social control destined to dwindle in relative importance as time goes on.

We have yet to show how belief came to be the handmaiden of social control.

Modern scholarship, unlike eighteenth century opinion, holds that belief in superhuman beings was not devised as an engine of priestcraft or statecraft. Belief everywhere had a long career before it was turned to account for social purposes. Even after this the subordination was not complete, and dogma continued to be shaped by other influences. We must admit at least two forces as coöperating with the social motive in the development of belief, viz., the speculative impulse and the yearning for consolation. Theology was undoubtedly a theory of things when it predicated another life and another world; undoubtedly a disciplinary tool when it differentiated the other world into heaven and hell. The enormous development of popular theology from Jesus to Anselm must have been largely due to the demands of a hierarchy confronted with the problem of maintaining order after the collapse of the Roman Empire.

To see how belief became ethical, let us take the Semitic religion. In a chaos of superstitions regarding ghosts, our attention is fixed by the attitude of a group of kinsmen toward the spirit of a departed ancestor. The feeling here was not fear, but rather the trust and fellowship that was possible only between those who were held together by the bond of blood kinship. The branch of belief that led to the practice of magic

and sorcery with reference to strange or hostile spirits had no social possibilities, and decayed early. For us the main stream of belief is that pertaining to the known god of the community, blood kin to all its members, and not at the service of the individual in his private aims. "Religion," says W. Robertson Smith, "is not an arbitrary relation of the individual man to a supernatural power, it is a relation of all the members of a community to a power that has the good of the community at heart and protects its law and moral order."¹

The god being conceived as ancestor may properly claim from his worshippers the reverence and service that belongs to a father. As patriarchal institutions develop the god, like the patriarch, comes to be looked upon as judge and king. As the business of the chief, however, was to lead the community against its enemies and not to meddle with its internal affairs, so the god had at first little concern with the doings of his worshippers. "What the Semitic communities asked, and believed themselves to receive from their divine king, lay mainly in three things: help against their enemies, counsel by oracles or soothsayers in matter of national difficulty, and a sentence of justice when a case was too hard for human decision. For the rest, it was not expected that he should always be busy weighing human affairs."² ". . . The conception of the tribal god as father . . . does not carry with it any idea of the strict and rigid enforcement of divine commands by supernatural sanctions."³

As monarchy develops, the old independence is broken down and the king is more able to interfere actively in his subjects' quarrels. By his authority he replaces the rude trial by strength with judicial decisions, realizing some ideal of abstract justice. *Faustrecht* is made to yield to awards based on general equity. Through this evolution the godhead follows the kingship like a shadow. "As the god though not conceived as omnipotent is at least conceived as much stronger than man, he becomes in a special measure the champion of right against

¹ *The Religion of the Semites*, p. 53.

² *Ibid.*, p. 64.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

might, the protector of the poor, the widow and the fatherless, of the one who has no helper on earth."¹

The precise way in which the divine sanction was annexed to conduct appears to have been the extension of the idea of *taboo*. From very early times, men recognized certain spots as the haunts of the god, and therefore sacred from intrusion. Holy places and things were "surrounded by a network of restrictions and disabilities which forbid them to be used by men except in particular ways and in certain cases forbid them to be used at all."² This place-taboo, which had within it the assertion of common property against private license, was extended to guard the sanctuary against acts or liberties that might offend the personal dignity of the god. At this point it needs but the socializing of the taboo to transform a jealous regard for sacred etiquette into an ethical holiness to which the sight of evil or injustice is an offense and an abomination.

Here lies the crisis in the history of religion. Belief, which has been hitherto a political badge, expressing on the one hand the alliance of the members of the political group, and, on the other, its separateness from any other group, now assumes a social office. It asserts not tribe against tribe but society against its individual members. It becomes an agent of social control. This momentous revolution is achieved by a very simple turn of ideas, viz., by conceiving that the god is pleased not by sacrifices, praise and ritual, but by certain forms of conduct and certain elements of character. "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord; I am full of the burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks or of lambs or of hegoats." "Your new moons and appointed feast my soul hateth; they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them.... Cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow."³

The same idea is expressed by Gautama when he said, "Rituals have no efficacy, prayers are vain repetitions and incan-

¹ *The Religion of the Semites*, p. 72.

² *Ibid.*, p. 139.

³ Isaiah, chap. I.

tations have no saving power. But to abandon covetousness and lust, to become free from evil passions, and to give up all hatred and ill-will, that is the right sacrifice and the true worship.”¹ But the complete identification of god-service with man-service awaited the exquisite humanity of Jesus’ saying — “Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these my brethren, even these least, ye did it unto me.”

EDWARD ALSWORTH ROSS.

STANFORD UNIVERSITY, CAL.

¹ CARUS, *The Gospel of Buddha*, chap. ix, v. 21.